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Letter dated 5 May 2016 from the Permanent Representative of Turkey to the United Nations addressed to the President of the Security Council

Upon instructions from my Government, I have the honour to enclose herewith a note on the baseless allegations contained in the letter dated 31 March 2016 from the Permanent Representative of the Russian Federation (S/2016/298) (see annex).

I would be grateful if the present letter and its annex could be circulated as a document of the Security Council.

(*Signed*) Y. Halit Çevik
Permanent Representative

16-07457 (E) 100516

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Annex to the letter dated 5 May 2016 from the Permanent Representative of Turkey to the United Nations addressed to the President of the Security Council

Note on the allegations by the Russian Federation regarding smuggling of antiquities by DEASH/ISIL

Turkey strongly deplores the attacks resulting in the destruction of cultural property constituting the common heritage of humanity by the terrorist organization DEASH/ISIL.

The authorities of Turkey, which is also a country of origin, are displaying continuous vigilance and handling the issue of prevention of trafficking and illicit transfer of cultural property with utmost care and diligence.

In order to prevent the looting and illegal transfer of historical artefacts from neighbouring countries of origin with which we share a common heritage, even before the first call was made by the Director General of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) in June 2012, Turkey has reinforced existing measures in accordance with its obligations arising from international instruments and mobilized all relevant institutions and agencies, including the Ministries of Culture, Customs and Trade, and the Interior, the General Commands of the Gendarmerie and the Turkish Coast Guard and private museums. UNESCO and the relevant Security Council committee have been informed about Turkey's efforts and findings, in accordance with Council resolution 2199 (2015), which Turkey co-sponsored.

The illicit trafficking in cultural property from conflict areas was on the agenda of the fifth International Conference of Experts on the Return of Cultural Property, hosted in Cappadocia, Turkey, from 18 to 22 October 2015. Participants expressed their deep concern about the destruction and the illicit trafficking of cultural property from Iraq and Syria and called for the urgent implementation of the relevant provision of Security Council resolution 2199 (2015).

The translation into Turkish of the Emergency Red List of Syrian Cultural Objects at Risk published by the International Council of Museums, and its subsequent dissemination to all relevant authorities in order to facilitate the identification of historical artefacts of Syrian origin, constitutes one of the recent examples of the steps taken by Turkey to counter the illicit trade in antiquities.

Turkey, as one of the founding members of UNESCO, is currently chairing its World Heritage Committee while preparing to host its next meeting, in Istanbul from 10 to 20 July 2016.

Within this context, the content of the note annexed to the letter from the Permanent Representative of the Russian Federation, entitled "Smuggling of antiquities by the international terrorist organization Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant", has been thoroughly investigated by the relevant Turkish authorities.

These investigations, carried out including in the provinces of Gaziantep, Şanlıurfa and Kilis, have resulted in no information, data or any other finding to substantiate or confirm the allegations contained in the above-mentioned note. For instance, the records of the license plate tracking system of Turkey have shown that

the trucks owned by the transport companies referred to in the letter of the Russian Federation have not even travelled to the province of Gaziantep.

In the light of these facts, the allegations by the Russian Federation are baseless, fabricated and part of a campaign carried out by that country against Turkey.